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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2290  
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU  
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RHMFIUU/AFOSI DET 523 IZMIR TU  
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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL  
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
FRIDAY, MAY 11, 2007

#### In Today's Papers

##### Turkish Parliament Approves Constitutional Reforms

All papers report that on Thursday, the Turkish Parliament approved a package of constitutional reforms, which includes the direct election of the president for a five-year term, renewable for another five years, and general elections to be held in every four years. The changes, backed by 376 MPs, more than the two-thirds of the lawmakers in the 550-seat assembly, have to be approved by President Sezer. Sezer will either approve the reforms within 15 days or send them back to the parliament for review. Prime Minister Erdogan said the package would be sent back to the presidency unchanged in case of a veto by Sezer. The main opposition CHP did not attend the vote while all 19 lawmakers from opposition Anavatan Party supported the reforms.

Another provision in the package requires that names of independent candidates appear on the combined ballot lists rather than on separate papers in general elections. Columnists criticize the change as it would make it extremely difficult for illiterate voters to pinpoint the independent candidates on combined lists, especially in the Kurdish-majority east and southeast parts of the country. Several columnists argue the law was designed to block the election of Kurdish independent candidates. They also expect that as a deception tactic, many people, who stand no chance of getting elected, will add their names as independent candidates in order to make the ballot list look crowded and confusing, making it hard for voters to identify their candidates.

##### High Court Chairwoman Warns against Fundamentalism

All papers report that, delivering a speech at a ceremony held Thursday to mark the anniversary of the founding of the Council of State (Danistay), the high court's chairwoman Sumru Cortoglu accused government officials of "encouraging fundamentalist elements." Cortoglu recalled that the attack staged against the Danistay members in May last year would be remembered as "a dark stain," stressing this attack was actually aimed at the secular state order,

the Republic, democracy and the supremacy of law. "Unfortunately, the presence of such a danger was ignored by the state authorities," Cortoglu emphasized.

#### Political Parties Campaign Seek Candidates

Mainstream Milliyet and Vatan report that the majority of bureaucrats who had resigned to run in July 22 general elections plan to run as AKP candidates. MHP is the next most preferred party.

Former Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz was willing to run under the Democrat Party, which was formed by ANAP and DYP. However, ANAP leader Erkan Mumcu objected to this idea and Yilmaz decided to run in the elections as independent candidate from Rize. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports that the 9th President Suleyman Demirel, who is regarded as the architect of DYP-ANAP merger, is trying to convince Agar to accept the inclusion of Genc Party in the merger.

#### Land Forces Commander General Basbug at Iraq Border

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet and others: Land Forces Commander General Basbug said during his visit to the southeastern city of Sirnak near the border with Iraq that the Turkish Security Forces "mission to render terrorists ineffective will continue and with an increasing determination in the coming period. We will pursue military operations till the separatist terrorist organization is totally obliterated."

#### Legal Problems for DTP Mayors

Mainstream Sabah reports that the Diyarbakir prosecutor demanded up to 10 year prison sentence for Batman mayor Huseyin Kalkan for referring to jailed PKK Leader Abdullah Ocalan as a "leader of Kurds" in an interview with the Los Angeles Times in May 2006. Sabah reports that Cizre mayor Aydin Budak has been removed from his post by the Interior Ministry because of a speech he made during

ANKARA 00001136 002 OF 003

Nevruz celebrations.

#### Editorial Commentary on Tony Blair Stepping Down

Zafer Arapkirli writes in the business and political daily Dunya: "When Blair started his first election campaign, he presented a very promising image with his vision and political courage. However given his performance during the last 10 years, unfortunately he will be remembered as a war monger and occupier. From the British domestic political angle, he will be remembered as a leader of capitalism because he turned his back on the labor unions -- groups which brought him his election victory in the first place. Sorry to say but with his departure we can remember and repeat his campaign motto in 1997 -- things can only get better."

Kubilay Celik writes in the nationalist daily Tercuman: "When he became the Labor Party leader, Blair promised that British youth would not be engaging in war any more. In reality, Britain engaged in all kinds of war during his rule, from Kosovo to Sierra Leone, and certainly the Iraq war. The terrorist attack in London was a result of his policies. British people have never forgiven him for following Bush unconditionally on the Iraq issue. He was facing growing pressure for resignation, and now he has made it official."

Sami Kohen writes in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "Blair's departure is a serious loss for Turkey. He demonstrated an active support for Turkey on every occasion, including the EU process, as he strongly believed in Turkey's geo-strategic importance. On the other hand, his departure holds a lesson for politicians because he made the decision to withdraw from leadership by himself. He could have waited another year until the next elections but he preferred not to weaken himself politically. The fact of the matter is that the decrease in popular support for Blair stems from the Iraq war. Had Britain not been in the Iraq war, Blair would not have faced negative pressure from the public. Yet he had some significant successes, especially on two issues. Under Blair's leadership the British economy has grown faster than that of many European countries. And he resolved the Northern Ireland problem which is a very important success. History will certainly find positive things to say about Tony Blair with the exception of the Iraq war."

TV Highlights  
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

#### Domestic News

- Lawyers say the existing laws allow the nomination of candidates at age 25 in the general elections and that there is no need to wait for constitutional reforms.
- Prime Minister Erdogan, accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, will travel to Erzurum over the weekend to address supporters.
- On May 13, a mass rally in support of the secular republic will be held in the Aegean port city of Izmir.
- The two-day "Forum Istanbul" meetings kicked off yesterday with a focus on the future of Turkey in light of international developments.

#### International News

- Secretary Rice praised the Islamist-inspired AKP and noted whatever the governing party's religious complexion, the Turkish government has instigated accession talks with the EU and passed a number of EU-inspired laws on religious and individual freedoms.
- Richard Holbrooke, former assistant US secretary of state, has

ANKARA 00001136 003 OF 003

warned Turkey against cooperation with Iran in the fight against the PKK, stressing this might lead to problems with NATO.

- The Council of Europe has called on PKK supporters outside the EU offices in Strasbourg to give up a hunger strike, protesting against the solitary confinement of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

WILSON